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Welcome back!



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TOP 10 MUST-SEE CITIES IN EUROPE

With so many fascinating European cities, how do you pick just ten? We've selected the ones that best trace the history and culture of the continent that so influenced all corners of the globe. It's in these ten cities that you begin to understand the different periods in European (and world) history, through stories of empires and conquests, and some of the greatest art and monuments ever created. Europe remains the world leader in art, architecture, food, fashion, design, and urban scenery, and here are the cities where you'll see some of the best of it all.



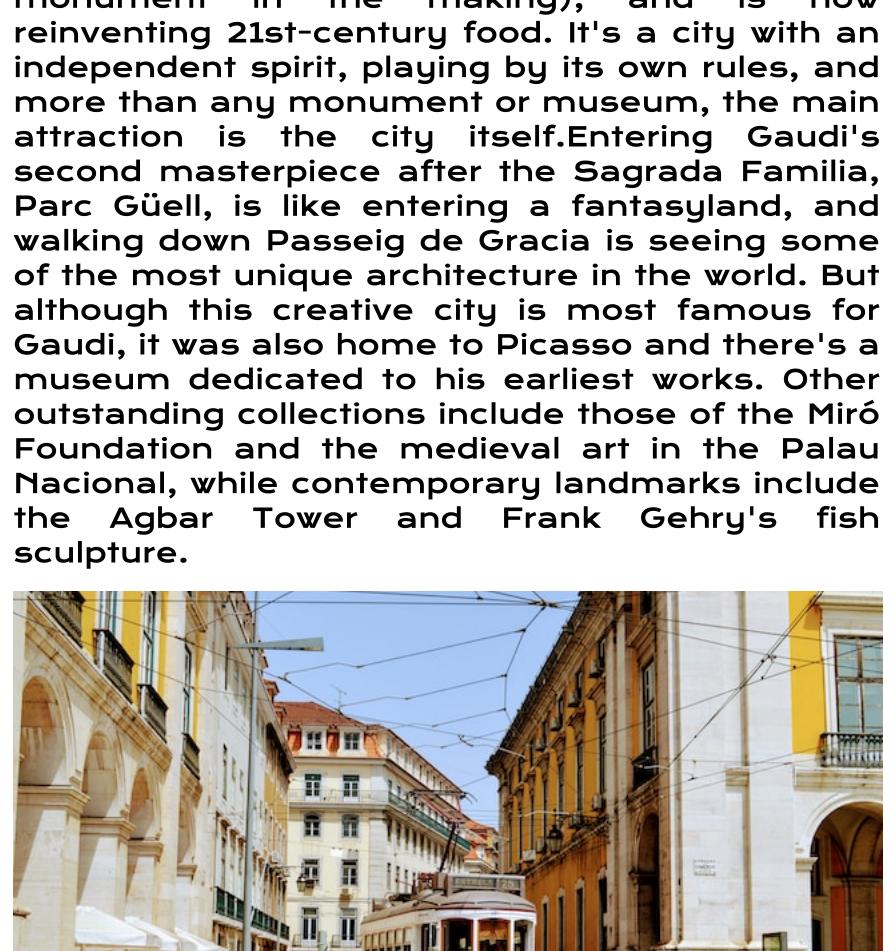
1. Paris

Paris is quintessential Europe, an opulent city often imitated around the continent and the world, but impossible to replicate. It captures the imagination for having mastered the art of sophisticated living, and never disappoints. Yes, there's the Eiffel Tower, the Notre Dame, the Champs-Élysées, and the biggest concentration of the world's greatest art at the Louvre, Orsay, Pompidou, and dozens of other museums, but the real Parisian experience is still sitting at a café or bistro, shopping down grand boulevards and squares, and strolling along the Seine. All the Parisien clichés are confirmed and enjoyed everywhere from Montmartre to Marais, and it's not difficult to see why this is the most inspiring of all cities.



2. Rome

A city so great, a country fits inside it. Visiting Rome is also visiting the Vatican with its extraordinary works of art, but the city mesmerizes mostly as the capital of an ancient empire. It ruled Europe and beyond, and icons like the Colosseum and the Pantheon still stand as testaments to centuries of splendor, as do the artistic marvels in the Borghese Gallery or the Capitoline Museums. But Rome is also about living "la dolce vita" down cobbled alleyways and squares, taking some time for long lunches, or simply for an espresso or gelato. And the photogenic Italian capital is not all about the past and crumbling antiquity, having a major contemporary attraction, the MAXXI Museum designed by Zaha Hadid.



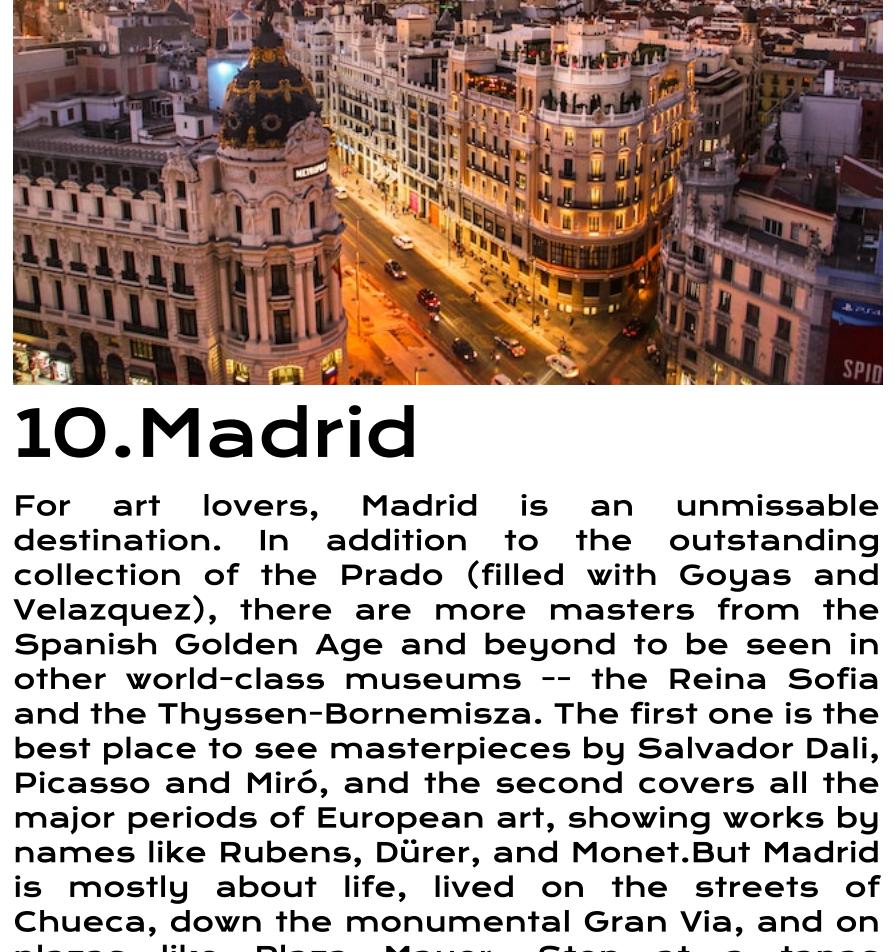
3. London

If Europe has a capital, it is London. It's the continent's largest and richest city, but that's not what makes it an unmissable destination. It's its diversity and cultural influence, and the fact that there is always something new to see and experience. There is always Big Ben and other landmarks like the Tower of London, the living history in Buckingham Palace and Westminster Abbey, and the major year-round exhibitions in Tate Modern, British Museum, and National Gallery, but also new icons like the Gherkin skyscraper and the tallest building in the continent, The Shard. At the top of the to-do list is also some of the best shopping in the world, but wherever you choose to go, you always find a thriving city constantly being revived, and a world leader in art and creativity.



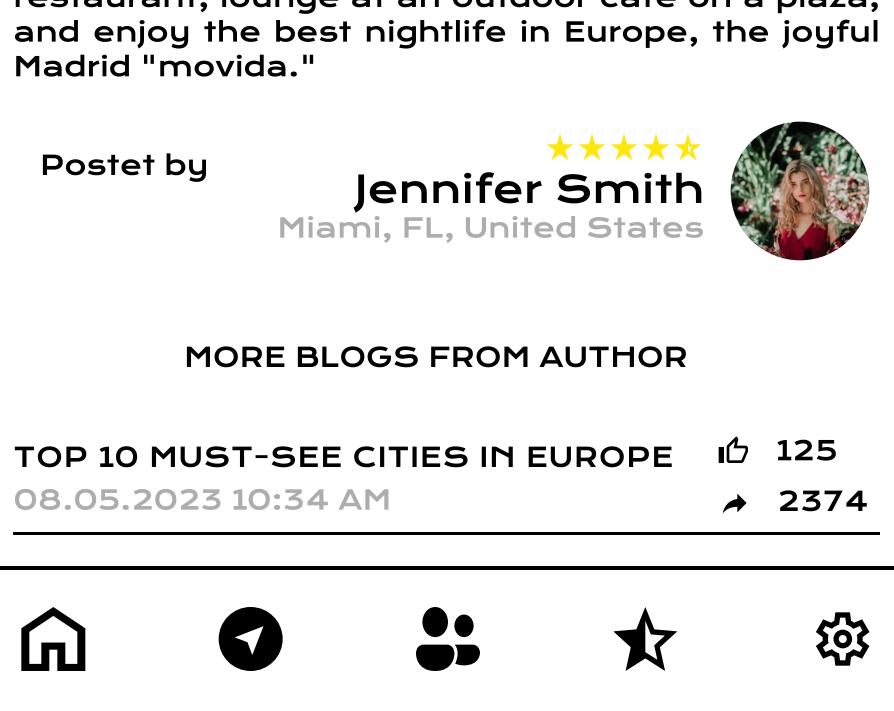
4. Venice

Standing in St. Mark's Square you'll be at the center of what was once the world's richest city and capital of trade, and you'll fall in love at first sight. It's home to the grandest private residences ever built, magnificent palazzos admired on a gondola trip down a romantic series of canals that make it the world's most beautiful city. Great wealth was also able to pay for great art, and you can see a lot of it at the Accademia Gallery. But the biggest work of art turns out to be Venice itself, the one city in the world that can truly be described as unique, exuding a fairytale atmosphere. After admiring the magical mixture of Renaissance, Byzantine, Gothic, and Baroque art and architecture, take some time for contemporary creativity inside the Peggy Guggenheim Museum.



5. Florence

Nowhere else can you best experience one of the greatest periods of European and world history (the Renaissance) than in Florence. This artistic city is an open-air museum and you get a history lesson even if you don't step inside any of its several museums. But no one should leave without entering the Uffizi, with its masterpieces by Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, and all the other great names in the history of art. This is a romantic city of beautiful piazzas showcasing magnificent architecture and sculpture, and all of that remarkable heritage can be admired from the top of the extraordinary Duomo.



6. Amsterdam

The Dutch Golden Age was also a European golden age, now remembered through the art in Amsterdam's museums. The Rijksmuseum has masterpieces by Rembrandt, while across the street there's an entire museum dedicated to Van Gogh, one of the most fascinating artists of all time. The Anne Frank House then reminds you of the darkest period in human history, and it's the most emotive memorial of all of the Holocaust memorials and museums around the world. And there are the canals lined by beautifully-maintained buildings, making the Dutch capital one of the most beautiful and welcoming cities in the world.

7. Athens

Some travelers express disappointment in Athens as a whole, expecting an entirely ancient city but finding a mostly unremarkable 20th century metropolis. But by the ancient Plaka neighborhood and the Acropolis you're taken back to the birthplace of democracy, and can get up close to some of the most marvelous ancient wonders. There's the Parthenon and the treasures found around it inside the Acropolis Museum (a beautiful contemporary home for a stunning ancient collection), and the National Archaeological Museum housing the most important artifacts from ancient Greece. Just for that, the mythical Greek capital should be on anyone's European travel itinerary.

8. Barcelona

Innovative Barcelona embodies contemporary Europe, an urban gem that values the past but embraces the future with vigor. It came up with some of the most original architecture of the 20th century (the Sagrada Familia is still a work-in-progress and you may witness a timeless monument in the making), and is now reinventing 21st-century food. It's a city with an independent spirit, playing by its own rules, and more than any monument or museum, the main attraction is the city itself. Entering Gaudí's second masterpiece after the Sagrada Familia, Parc Güell, is like entering a fantasyland, and walking down Passeig de Gracia is seeing some of the most unique architecture in the world. But although this creative city is most famous for Gaudí, it was also home to Picasso and there's a museum dedicated to his earliest works. Other outstanding collections include those of the Miró Foundation and the medieval art in the Palau Nacional, while contemporary landmarks include the Agbar Tower and Frank Gehry's fish sculpture.

9. Lisbon

This mostly-sunny Atlantic capital really makes you feel like you're on the edge of the continent, and that's what made it wonder about other lands. The European golden age of maritime exploration spearheaded by Prince Henry the Navigator (seen leading other notable figures like Vasco da Gama on the colossal waterfront Discoveries Monument) led to globalization as we know it, and Lisbon became the first global capital, the gateway to Europe from the East. That story is now told through the collections of the Ancient Art, Orient, and Maritime museums, and reflected on sculpted Age of Discovery marvels like the Tower of Belém and Jerónimos Monastery. Lisbon is also the best place in the world to admire the art of tile painting, at the one-of-a-kind Tile Museum and at several monuments around the city, but perhaps the biggest attraction of all are the inspiring views of what is Europe's most scenic capital, from hilltop terraces serving as lookout points. Contemporary attractions include the world-class Berardo, MAAT, and Design and Fashion museums, as well as the Santiago Calatrava-designed Oriente Station and the Portugal Pavilion by Siza Vieira.

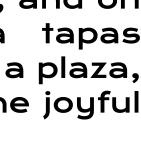
10. Madrid

For art lovers, Madrid is an unmissable destination. In addition to the outstanding collection of the Prado (filled with Goyas and Velazquez), there are more masters from the Spanish Golden Age and beyond to be seen in other world-class museums -- the Reina Sofia and the Thyssen-Bornemisza. The first one is the best place to see masterpieces by Salvador Dalí, Picasso and Miró, and the second covers all the major periods of European art, showing works by names like Rubens, Dürer, and Monet. But Madrid is mostly about life, lived on the streets of Chueca, down the monumental Gran Vía, and on plazas like Plaza Mayor. Stop at a tapas restaurant, lounge at an outdoor café on a plaza, and enjoy the best nightlife in Europe, the joyful Madrid "movida."

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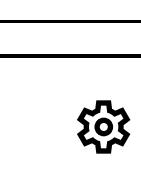
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